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ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

Why Is the World So Dangerous? An Alternative View

FROM:

Harold P. Ford
NIO at Large

EXTENSION

NO.

NIC 8784-83

DATE

6 Dec 83

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

DATE

OFFICER'S INITIALS

COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)

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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 8784-83
6 December 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
Herbert E. Meyer, Vice Chairman, NIC

FROM : Hal Ford
National Intelligence Officer At Large

SUBJECT : Why Is the World So Dangerous? An Alternative View

1. I want to second some of the alerts Herb has sounded, but disagree with him about other of his alarms, and about a lot of the world picture he paints in arriving at his conclusions. My differences are not just academic, but relate professionally to how we should assess world developments most accurately for our policymaking consumers.

2. Herb's think piece performs some useful functions in stimulating intelligence officers (a) to avoid straight line projections in the belief that the world will necessarily go on about as it has; (b) to be alert to the possibility of a Soviet-initiated rise in the intensity of global competition, and hence to the prospect of an especially dangerous possible period of world history immediately ahead of us; (c) to acknowledge that the USSR's world-wide network of CPs, agents, client states and groups offers Moscow considerably greater opportunities for creating trouble than is often appreciated; and (d) to entertain the idea that the USSR's vulnerabilities and disarray may be substantially greater than has been generally acknowledged.

3. Apart from these considerations, however, I disagree fairly strongly with a number of the propositions of the memo. Overall, it tends to pick and choose only selected data, those which happen to fit the particular arguments being advanced. As for specific areas where I disagree, the memo overstates:

- The uniqueness of present violence in the world.
- The possible degree of alarm on the part of Soviet leaders in 1983, as compared, say, with their probable world view in 1979.
- Soviet causation of various ills in the world.

- The likelihood that a significant number of Soviet leaders believe that the USSR has had it, and is now terminally ill.
- The according readiness of such Soviet leaders to "go for it."

4. Is there a rise of global violence? In the first place, it can be questioned whether there is such a thing as "global violence." There are, certainly, always many violent situations in train at any one time in the world, stemming from countless causes. Secondly, there is nothing too distinctive about recent months: there are many times in the past where a number of disparate, dramatic events could have been viewed as a "sharp rise in violence in the world." Certainly various years could so qualify: for example, 1948-1949, 1950, 1963, 1968, and so on -- even Herb's own 1979 (i.e., Iran, Afghanistan, Rhodesia, the Nicaraguan revolution, the Yemeni war, the China-Vietnam war, etc.). And, Lebanon's self-immolation did not begin in 1983. Thirdly, in selecting only certain violent events, what does one think about other continuing bloodshed now: in Iran-Iraq, Timor, Spanish Sahara, Northern Ireland, the southern Philippines, Latin America, and many other locales? Are all these, too, the product of Soviet impetus? Fourthly, 1982-1983 could have been picked for making a case just opposite to that of Herb's memo -- that is, a time of especially unique non-Communist violence: e.g., the Falklands; heightened resistance movements in Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique, Nicaragua, and Ethiopia; Israel's armed initiatives in Lebanon; the invasion of Grenada; and US, French, and Israeli reprisals in Lebanon.

5. Is 1983 so much worse a year than 1979, say, for Soviet leaders that they have become despondent about the course of world revolution? Again, the memo does not clue the reader that there may be offsetting data that do not happen to fit the memo's construct. True, Soviet leaders almost certainly have been frustrated by many developments in the last year or so, and certainly most of all by the way the United States has stirred itself at home and abroad. But are the Soviet setbacks as momentous as the memo makes them? And are they so much worse, say, than in 1979? That year, 1979, was itself no great shakes for Soviet leaders, given for example the then-recent US recognition of China, and Soviet fears at the time of an impending US-PRC alliance; NATO's INF decision and the nightmare prospect this presented Moscow of Pershing II warheads ten minutes away; the sharply adverse worldwide reactions to the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, including China's cutting off of what had been somewhat promising talks with the USSR; the necessity the Soviets faced of having to repair their fortunes in the Horn of Africa, after having been deprived of the good thing they had had going in Somalia; and the beginnings of a sharp decline in Brezhnev's health. Also, most of the facets of Soviet domestic malaise that Herb's memo lists for 1983 were already of great concern to Soviet leaders then, in 1979.

6. Are the Soviets indeed the source of all this recent "global violence?" Here the memo is on shaky ground, in attributing to what it terms a rickety USSR the capability to orchestrate the world's grief. Granted, the Central American and Lebanon challenges to US interests are much the worse because of the Soviet pressures back of the Cubans and the Syrians, and the USSR certainly initiates and exploits much trouble the world around, including -- in my view -- much more in the way of terrorist activities than we have yet been able to document. But it's quite another thing to see some brooding Slavic malevolence behind all kinds of disparate crises in the world. This applies in particular to the memo's listing of the KAL shootdown: why did these clever Soviets so botch their responses to that flight, both on the spot and subsequently? And just what did they have in mind when they put the North Koreans up to the Rangoon bombing? Did the Soviets purposely intend to deal North Korean fortunes a heavy blow? It cannot be excluded that the Soviets planned the murder of Aquino, but what happens to the giant causation thesis if we learn some day, say, that some of Marcos' (or Imelda's) own thugs mistakenly thought they were serving their boss when on their own they did away with their troublesome Becket?

7. The principal disservice the giant causation thesis performs does not relate to these particular issues in debate between Herb and me, however, but to the broad question of how best can intelligence guide policymakers to the true state of the world, and to the true sources of that world's troubles. Even if the USSR and the CPSU did not exist, the late 20th-Century world would be experiencing much violence. All kinds of people would still be killing one another: Arabs vs. Arabs, Shias vs. Sunnis, Gemayel Christians vs. Franjeh Christians, Arabs vs. Israelis, Southeast Asians, Palestinians vs. Palestinians, East Indians, Irishmen, Africans, Iranians - Iraqis, and so on. The root sources of world violence would continue to reside chiefly in the forces of historic antagonisms, unresolved territorial disputes, dislocations of de-colonization, wide disparities in wealth, gross social and political inequities, tribal and religious emotionalisms, distorted debt loads, the sharp rise in the number of political actors, the increase of literacy and education but not of opportunity, the gaps between expectations and reality, the instant awareness of TV and cassette without accompanying responsibility, the ready access to arms, and so on and so on. Certainly many of these troubles are of greater danger to US interests because of Soviet exploitation. But constructive US policy attack on the world's violence requires that we address its root sources rather than settling for cursing the Soviet darkness, and that we ask ourselves more often, "Just where do the Communists come from?"

8. Is the outlook of some Soviet leaders now wholly bleak, and do they indeed consider that the October Revolution is going down the drain of history? Herb's memo once again raises only a partial list of considerations. In many respects the future must certainly look unpromising to Soviet leaders. But the memo does not mention many issues which various Soviet leaders may feel will work to the disadvantage of the United States

over the long term, and so prevent it from reversing "the inescapable logic of historical determinism." Mistakenly or not, Soviet leaders may well consider that such issues include: the weak political base for US objectives that exists in Lebanon; difficulties the United States faces in increasing its influence among Arab audiences; a United States identified with Israel but not in control of its domestic and foreign initiatives; the strong hand the Soviet-backed Syrians hold; the vulnerability of the US allies to any diminution of Gulf oil supplies; the intimidating effect which the USSR's strategic power and expanding military reach can exert in the world; the security dependence of NATO on certain weapons which are becoming more difficult political instruments for NATO; the growth of neutralism in Western Europe, especially among the rising generation; the many difficulties the United States faces in the Third World, and the existence of many Soviet assets and intermediaries there; the not to be excluded possibility that Central America and Mexico may constitute a long-term time bomb for the United States; the absence of US foreign policy consensus; and the existence of sufficient economic and sociological problems within the United States to give Soviet ideologues confidence that a society with such "inherent contradictions" cannot in the long run prevail over the more disciplined USSR.

9. US policy certainly must stay alert to the possibility that the USSR is much weaker than has generally been acknowledged, and must develop improved ways and means of exploiting such weakness to US and allied benefit. At the same time, US intelligence and policymaking officers must keep that view of the Soviet condition in perspective, weighing it against the greater possibility that the USSR -- rude, brutal, and crude -- is going to be with us for years to come, continuing to present enormous challenges to US security and policymaking. I would hazard the guess that the US-Soviet cold war may still be confronting our grandchildren; that two world systems will still be locked in competition a la earlier Islam-Christendom or the wars of religion; that the Soviet challenge will not disappear as the result either of its own folly or of the brilliance of this or that Republican/Democratic policy initiatives; and that the reduction of that challenge will require a long sustained effort; much acuity; much imagination; much consistent, measured toughness; much diplomatic skill; much attack on the root causes of vulnerability to Soviet and Communist exploitation; and -- not least -- much in the way of taxes.

10. Will despairing Soviet leader "go for it?" We must of course keep our watch up and our powder dry. But, the cruxes of Soviet -- indeed Russian -- policy have been steady pressure, long-term outlook, and a fairly keen sense of what the traffic will bear in risk-taking in each circumstance. The bear is patient. His modulated pressures have paid off in many ways over the decades. His leaders are not damn fools. Since Stalin the ponderous bureaucratic necessity for consensus has prevented any leader or leadership faction from getting too far out ahead on any dramatic new foreign policy initiative. The Soviet leaders and the Soviet public know -- far better than do we, for that matter -- what war on a large scale can bring to the

homeland. And, if the bear doesn't like the present US Administration, the surest way some Soviet leaders can rally the American people around another term for that Administration will be to "go for it" in some way, or to pull off a coup of sorts within the Kremlin and embark the USSR on a program of greatly heightened aggressiveness in the world. In the near term at least, the Soviets have got to sort out their troubling succession problem. In past experience at least, such periods have not given birth to aggressive new adventurism, although we must of course watch that succession with extra care, to insure against the outside contingency that some Soviet Strangelove faction has not taken control of the USSR's destiny -- and ours.

11. What is the so-what of these alternative views of the world's violence? The answer is one thing if the debate is just between two intelligence officers. The significance would be quite otherwise, in my opinion, in the event senior policymakers should subscribe to many of the views Herb's memo advances.


Hal Ford